



Morning Alert - Wednesday, May 2, 2018

The following information reflects the reporting of the cited news media and does not reflect the opinions of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Japan Media Highlights is intended for USG use only and should not be forwarded. Visit the website [here](#). For more information, contact TokyoMATT@state.gov.

HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, NTV, and TV Asahi led with updates on the escaped prisoner who was caught in Hiroshima. Fuji TV led with a report on a series of suspicious fires in Saitama on Tuesday. TBS gave top play to a report that a rollercoaster at Universal Studios Japan stopped mid-ride and left some riders hanging upside down for more than two hours before they were rescued.

Major front-page items in national dailies included reports related to next week's trilateral summit in Tokyo between Japan, China, and South Korea; the results of a public opinion survey pointing to strong opposition to constitutional revision under the Abe administration; and a scuffle that took place in front of the Japanese Consulate General in Busan on Tuesday over attempts to install a bronze figure symbolizing Koreans who were subjected to forced labor by Japanese firms during WWII.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan, China, ROK to demand North Korea's denuclearization

Yomiuri wrote in its lead story that Japan, China, and South Korea are likely to issue a joint statement at their trilateral summit in Tokyo on May 9 calling for North Korea to dismantle its nuclear and ballistic programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner. But according to the article, Japan and South Korea are at odds with China over the language of the statement concerning economic sanctions. Tokyo and Seoul are reportedly insisting on the need to maintain the maximum pressure campaign at least for the time being, whereas Beijing is calling for easing the pressure. The three countries are expected to announce cooperation in areas ranging from economy to sports and culture. The leaders are also reportedly set to agree on accelerating trilateral FTA talks.

In an official announcement on hosting the diplomatic event in Tokyo, Prime Minister Abe told the press in Amman on Tuesday: "We would like to hold in-depth discussions on how North Korea should take the right path and how to resolve the abduction, nuclear, and missile issues in a comprehensive manner so as to open up a bright future." As for the possibility of holding a bilateral summit with DPRK leader Kim Jong Un, the premier said: "Japan will consistently uphold its policy of seeking a comprehensive settlement of the abduction, nuclear, and missile issues based on the Pyongyang Declaration, coming to terms with the unfortunate past, and achieving diplomatic normalization." PM Abe will reportedly hold bilateral summits with Chinese Premier Li and South Korean President Moon on the sidelines of the trilateral talks.

President Trump mentions DMZ as potential site for summit with DPRK leader

All national papers except Nikkei highlighted remarks made to the press on Monday by President Trump, who noted that his planned summit with Kim Jong Un may be held at Panmunjom at the DMZ. The President also mentioned Singapore as a potential site. The dailies speculated that the U.S. leader appears to be very interested in meeting with his DPRK counterpart at the DMZ to emulate the "historic summit" between Kim and South Korean President Moon that drew strong media attention. Sankei projected that a Panmunjom summit would be a "dramatic" way to play up the momentum for a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula since the DMZ "symbolizes confrontation" between the DPRK army and the UN command led by the U.S. military.

In a related story, Asahi wrote that according to a DPRK source, the Kim regime is making preparations to host the U.S.-DPRK summit in Pyongyang based on the assessment that the "politically ambitious" U.S. leader will ultimately decide to visit North Korea.

Police, activists scuffle over forced labor statue in front of Japanese consulate in Busan

All Tuesday evening papers reported on a scuffle that occurred in front of the Japanese Consulate General in Busan yesterday between riot police and some 100 civic activists and unionists who tried to install a statue in honor of Koreans subjected to forced labor by Japanese companies during WWII. The ROK government had urged the activists not to put up the statue since it would trigger "diplomatic friction." The local authorities had also asked the organizers not to install it.

According to this morning's papers, the police were successful in preventing the statue from being erected. Asahi said the fact that the local police blocked the installation contrasts sharply with their previous condoning of the establishment of a comfort women statue in almost the same location in 2016, conjecturing that the Moon administration probably asked the Busan authorities to prohibit the statue's installation in order to better "manage" bilateral relations with Japan with the ultimate goal of obtaining Tokyo's cooperation in further improving Seoul's ties with Pyongyang. The daily added that the GOJ is pleased with the Moon administration's response because the installation of the statue could have undercut mutual cooperation toward the denuclearization of North Korea.

ECONOMY

Top Thai official expresses keen interest in joining CPTPP

All papers wrote from Bangkok that visiting Economic Revitalization Minister Motegi met with Deputy Prime Minister Somkid and other senior Thai officials on Tuesday and exchanged views on the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). According to the Japanese official, the Thai officials voiced a “strong commitment” to joining the regional free trade deal “as soon as possible.” The existing 11 members are reportedly likely to hold a chief negotiators’ meeting in June or July to discuss Bangkok’s bid to join the accord. Noting that Colombia, Taiwan, and the UK have also expressed interest in joining the CPTPP, Yomiuri said Tokyo is anxious to enlist additional members in a bid to encourage the U.S. to return to the regional trade liberalization framework.

Trade minister voices “regret” at U.S.’s refusal to exempt Japan from steel tariffs

On the White House’s announcement on Monday regarding the postponement of the imposition of steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada, the European Union, and Mexico until June 1, Mainichi wrote that Trade Minister Seko released a statement on Tuesday expressing “extreme regret” that Japanese metals are still subject to the punitive duties. He said: “We will continue to strongly lobby the United States so as to seek an exemption,” adding that Tokyo will use the WTO and other venues to ask for immunity.

SECURITY

Senior Pentagon official comments on “nuclear umbrella”

Nikkei front-paged remarks made during a security symposium held in Stanford, California, on Monday by Assistant Secretary of Defense Randall Schriver, who said that the issue of the “nuclear umbrella” that the U.S. extends to Japan and South Korea will not be discussed in future meetings between the U.S. and North Korea. Speaking on North Korea’s insistence on creating a Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons, the senior DOD official said: “North Korea has used the term ‘denuclearization’ with a broad meaning.... Our defense commitment to our allies will not be shaken at all. Extended deterrence must be enhanced further.”

Yesterday evening’s edition of the same paper took up remarks made at the seminar by former Defense Minister Ishiba, who argued that Tokyo should take on a greater defense burden so as to rectify the asymmetric nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance. He was quoted as saying: “The security obligation of each nation is completely different. Japan should take responsibility for defending the United States in order to bring its obligation closer to that of the U.S.” The Japanese politician also underscored the importance of revising the SOFA by saying: “The U.S. military stationed in Japan must be subject to Japanese laws as much as possible.” The security forum was reportedly cosponsored by Nikkei and the Hoover Institution.

